

St. Bede Academy's Fifty Game Winning Streak

James Hanson

St. Bede Academ, Peru

Teacher: Michael Pomatto

In the years 1940-1942, St. Bede Academy in Peru, Illinois had a fifty game winning streak in a combination of sports. This winning streak started with three wins at the end of the 1940-41 basketball season. It then led into the 1941 baseball team who had a 17-0 record. This continued into an 8-0 football season in 1941 and then a 22 consecutive game winning streak in the 1941-1942 basketball season. Former Academy athlete and now Abbey Prior Sebastian Lewis, S.B., said, "...winning was just our way of life. Almost as though we didn't know how to lose!"

Coach Bron Bacevich did a lot for the athletics at St. Bede. He not only helped lead the Bruins football, basketball, and baseball team into the winning streak, but also affected the students and how they played. As a coach, he was a hard worker. One of his players, Howard Schmidt, said "He'd scout the teams we were going to play." He cared about winning, and he was serious about succeeding in every sport. The other teams claimed that the Bruins knew their plays better than they did. Many of the students also claimed that he not only coached them and helped them, but also "molded us into a team." The players thought they did not have a lot of talent, but they went undefeated. Coach Bacevich was a motivator. He taught the students how to stay with what they are doing and work hard in it to become better. For his retirement in 1974 he wrote a poem called "The Man Who Thinks He can." It goes as follows:

If you think you are beaten, you are:

If you think dare not, you don't!

If you would like to win, but think you can't

It's almost a cinch that you wont

If you think you will lose, you lost:

For out in the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will;
It's all in the state of mind!
If you think you're outclassed, you are;
You've got to think high to rise.
You've got to be sure of yourself
Before you can win the prize
Life's battles don't always go
To the fastest or strongest man;
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can.

During the baseball season, on Friday May 23, 1942, at La Rose Field, an outstanding game was played. The key to this game were the homeruns hit by "Pinky" Walsh, Joe Van Hooreweghe, Howard Schmidt, Stan Kozel, and Leno Bernabei. The final score was 26 - 1. The only real close game against the Bruins was played against De Pue. Joe Van Hooreweghe and Stan Kozel both hit triples for the Bruins bringing the final score to 4 - 0. During the football season on September 19, 1942, St. Bede opened its twenty-first season against Streator High. St. Bede played hard in the first half against Streator with a score of 13 - 0 at the end of the half. The second half brought about more of the same; Streator spent the rest of the game pushing the Bruins back, but they quickly vanished with a long punt or a quick kick from the Bruins. The final score remained the same, 13 - 0. Streator had 246 rushing yards and 220 yards and did not score. This game was important because it showed they needed to change in order to win. The

Bruins became a defensive team and learned to strategize to remain a winning team. The last game of the streak was in basketball. It was On February 27, 1942 against the Hall Red Devils in Spring Valley. The Red Devils fought fiercely on their home floor. With about a minute left, St. Bede trailed 19-20, but Van Hooreweghe called a timeout, worked up a play, and took the lead. Another basket was added for the Bruins, and the game ended. This was the last game that the Bruins won in the streak. It ended against Streater. Streater scored 18 points in the first half and St. Bede scored 24. In the second half, the Bruins held Streater until the end when Streater scored two points before the gun went off and defeated the Bruins 26 - 21. The streak was broken.

The fifty game winning streak gave the students a new sense of team spirit and pride. When the athletes created this winning streak, most of the athletes did not know they were running up the record. They played the way they should, and winning just became their way of life. Both Fr. William Kirk, O.S.B., and Prior Sebastian Lewis, O.S.B., agreed that it gave not only the athletes, but also other people involved in the school something to think about at that time. The majority of the athletes in this record were in all three sports; it kept them together and bonded them to create a greater team spirit. This led them to do better in the future, to keep carrying out the winning streak, and gave the school a new feeling of pride. Prior Sebastian Lewis, O.S.B., said, "the students certainly built up school spirit," which gave the people of St. Bede a feeling that they are part of something greater.

The winning streak has benefited St. Bede Academy in several ways. Coach Bacevich influenced the athletes positively; this brought them closer causing more school spirit. It also attracted more talent and people into the school. In these ways, it helped St. Bede grow not only with enrollment, but also with bonds of friendship bringing people closer together, making St.

Bede a more enjoyable place. [From *Bureau County Republican*, June 12, 1997; St. Bede Records, Feb. 28, 1942; student historian's interview with Prior Sebastian Lewis, O.S.B., Jan. 9, 2004; student historian's interview with Fr. William Kirk, O.S.B., Jan. 9, 2004.]